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Fifth Committee

Summary record of the 1st meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 4 October 2012, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Mr. Berger. . . . . (Germany)
Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. Kelapile

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Organization of work (A/C.5/67/1; A/C.5/67/L.1)

1. **The Chair** invited members to consider the proposed programme of work of the Committee for the main part of the session and the note on the status of preparedness of the relevant documentation (A/C.5/67/L.1). A separate list on the status of documentation would be issued for the first and second parts of the resumed session.

2. The late submission of reports was a chronic problem: only 62 per cent of planned documents for the current session had been submitted on time, as against the Secretary-General's target of 90 per cent. The Bureau had met with the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management and the Department of Management to discuss the slotting system; he hoped that, with the cooperation of the Secretariat and Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, a better outcome could be achieved with more transparency and greater accountability on the part of author departments.

3. He wished to highlight some of the recommendations made by the General Committee in its first report (A/67/250) and adopted by the Assembly at its 2nd plenary meeting. The Fifth Committee should complete its work for the main part of the session by 14 December 2012. In view of financial constraints, meetings of the Main Committees, including informal meetings, should start promptly at 10 a.m. and be adjourned by 6 p.m. In accordance with past practice, the requirement that at least one quarter of the members should be present in order to declare a meeting open and to permit debate to proceed should be waived. The General Committee had drawn attention to rules 106, 109, 114 and 115 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly regarding the conduct of meetings.

4. Efforts should be made to reduce the number of resolutions adopted, and resolutions should not contain requests for reports from the Secretary-General unless such reports were strictly necessary for the implementation of those resolutions or for the continued consideration of an item. Resolutions should be short and action-oriented. In addition, the Main Committees should merely take note of the reports of the Secretary-General or of subsidiary bodies which did not require a decision by the Assembly and should neither debate nor adopt resolutions on them unless specifically requested to do so.

5. **Mr. Benmehidi** (Algeria), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that concerns persisted over the late issuance of important reports, which put additional pressure both on the Advisory Committee and the Fifth Committee. He urged the Secretariat to take corrective action and hoped that the reduction in resources allocated for translation would not further aggravate that long-standing problem. It was hoped that the Bureau would continue to engage with the Secretariat and the Advisory Committee to ensure that pending reports would be issued promptly and that reports for future sessions would be available six weeks prior to the commencement of the session.

6. He welcomed the balanced programme of work prepared by the Bureau. In accordance with past practice, the Group would endorse the proposed programme on the understanding that it would be reviewed and amended after the first week, as needed.

7. As always, the Committee's deliberations should be inclusive and transparent to ensure that decision-making took place among the entire membership, not within small groups. Member States had a collective responsibility to take decisions that were beneficial to the Organization and enabled it to discharge its mandates effectively and efficiently.

8. **Mr. Coffi** (Côte d'Ivoire), speaking on behalf of the Group of African States, said that the late issuance of documents remained a major challenge for the Committee and requested the Secretariat to provide detailed explanations regarding documents for the session, including information on the role that author departments had played in creating the situation and the impact of cuts in resources for the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management. To facilitate the effective discharge of the Fifth Committee's mandate and to ensure that each agenda item received proper consideration, all pending reports should be issued as soon as possible in all the United Nations official languages.

9. He reiterated the Group's view that the Committee should conduct its work in a transparent and inclusive manner.

10. **Ms. Pakarati** (Chile), speaking on behalf of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), said that among the issues to be taken up at

the session to which the Group attached special importance were the scales of assessment for the regular and peacekeeping budgets, human resources management, the pension system and the capital master plan. Action by the Committee was urgently required on funding and backstopping arrangements for special political missions.

11. The constant failure of the Secretariat to present reports on time made it increasingly difficult for Member States to analyse the documents properly and for the Committee to conclude its work in the time allotted. She urged the Secretariat to rectify that recurrent problem and to ensure the timely issuance of reports.

12. The Group joined in calling upon all Member States to pay their contributions in full and on time in order to ensure the Organization's proper functioning. The Group condemned any unilateral act or measure against any Member State of the Organization that sought to interfere in or prevent the payment of its assessed contributions.

13. **Mr. Mayr-Harting** (Observer for the European Union), speaking also on behalf of the acceding country Croatia; the candidate countries Iceland, Montenegro and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; the stabilization and association process and potential candidate countries Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina; and, in addition, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova, said that the quality and efficiency of the Committee's deliberations depended on the timely submission of all required documentation in all official languages.

14. He recalled that the budget for the biennium 2012-2013 had been adopted on the understanding that recosting and any additional costs would be absorbed. Every effort must be made to avoid a piecemeal approach that would substantially increase the agreed budget. The current practice of recosting was no longer sustainable and alternatives were needed to ensure greater budgetary transparency and predictability. He asked that the Secretary-General identify the relative priority of funding requests and develop better working methods to ensure the most effective and efficient use of resources. In the current global economic climate, it was more important than ever that the same strict budgetary discipline should be applied to United Nations budgets as was being applied to Member States' finances. The preparation of the budget outline for the biennium 2014-2015 provided an opportunity for a genuine reassessment of resource requirements. The budget process should be reformed to ensure greater discipline, transparency and accountability.

15. Another priority objective was to ensure that the scale of assessments reflected a more equitable and balanced distribution of the financial responsibilities among Member States according to their capacity to pay and to safeguard the financial stability of the Organization.

16. While important progress had been made in reforming human resources management within the Organization and further reforms would be considered at the current session, no proposals could be approved without a full explanation of likely budgetary implications. It was important, moreover, to ensure that the full benefits of previous reforms had been realized. In addition to the human resources management reform, other initiatives such as Umoja and enterprise resource planning would contribute to the modernization of the Organization. He welcomed the strengthened governance structure of Umoja and said that it was crucial to the project's success that the right level of ambition for the business re-engineering process should be defined.

17. The General Assembly had continuously reaffirmed the importance of executing the capital master plan on time and within budget, in a transparent and accountable manner. The Secretariat should continue to seize opportunities to lower contract and operations costs with the aim of absorbing add-ons, while still ensuring quality.

18. Lastly, he asked that the documents concerning the budgets of the special political missions be issued as soon as possible. He recognized the importance of effective and efficient support arrangements for such missions, but reiterated that the European Union would reject any proposed measures that represented a move away from the regular budget scale.

19. **Mr. Yamazaki** (Japan) said that his delegation welcomed the Secretary-General's efforts to improve management of the Secretariat and improve transparency. Careful consideration would be given to the proposed mobility framework, which could lead to a more global and dynamic Secretariat. The steady implementation of Umoja would also contribute to improving the efficiency, effectiveness and accountability of the Organization.

20. His delegation urged discipline with respect to additional requirements for the current budget and requested the Secretariat to take a fresh look at the Organization's needs when preparing the budget proposals for the next biennium. The financing of special political missions was an important issue to his delegation. It was to be hoped that consensus could be reached on all the issues relating to resolution 41/213.

21. **Mr. Torsella** (United States of America) said that the United Nations faced mounting challenges even as resources became scarcer. To bridge that gap, the Committee must foster a more efficient and entrepreneurial culture that would equip the Organization to meet its challenges in development, human rights, peace and security over the long term.

22. The General Assembly had made good progress in reforming contractual arrangements and harmonizing conditions of service for United Nations system staff, but had not yet tackled the question of how to attract, develop and retain the right number of highly qualified staff members and compensate them appropriately. The human resources management system required urgent reform; he therefore looked forward to examining during the current session the Secretary-General's proposal on a mobility framework. Broader structural reforms were also needed to ensure that the right people were in the right place at the right time as part of a lean, high performing and sustainable Organization.

23. United Nations staff should be subject to the measures that were taken by the private sector and national Governments during difficult times, including pay freezes. He therefore commended the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) for deferring a pay increase for New York-based staff in August 2012, a small step towards controlling staff costs that hardly compared to the salary freezes and cuts borne by the citizens of many Member States.

24. His delegation was concerned that the promised initiatives for savings under the 2012-2013 regular budget had not yet been implemented and that additional requirements, including recosting, could add to the agreed budget level. The Organization had a responsibility to manage prudently the resources provided by Member States and to work within its approved budget; he therefore urged staff, managers and Member States to support the Secretary-General in his efforts to find further savings. While some urgent needs truly had been unforeseen, particularly for peace, security and humanitarian crises, other activities that should have been foreseen but had not been included in the budget should be deferred. He commended the Secretariat on its efforts to manage special political missions within the approved biennial budget level. His delegation looked forward to discussing how best to support such missions, which promoted peace and security in some of the most troubled areas of the world and were fundamental to the purposes of the United Nations.

25. The preparation of the budget outline for 2014-2015 afforded an opportunity to build on the budgetary accomplishments of the current biennium. The Secretariat should abandon the practice of simply using the previous budget level as a starting point; instead, managers should carry out a thorough needs assessment in order to optimize the use of resources while delivering on mandates.

26. He welcomed the Secretariat's efforts to rein in the cost overruns in the capital master plan. Every avenue must be explored to bring the project back within the approved budget; his delegation would not support an additional assessment for the project. The Secretary-General should communicate to staff a clear message that the Umoja enterprise resource planning project was essential for modernizing and streamlining the Organization and would make it possible to meet mandates better and more economically.

27. He welcomed the recent decision by the executive boards of the New York-based funds and programmes to disclose internal audit reports and hoped that the General Assembly would follow suit. Greater transparency regarding how funds were spent would raise the bar for performance. Member States should not maintain the status quo but should choose the difficult path of progress towards a stronger, more transparent and more accountable United Nations in the interest of all those whom it served.

28. **Mr. Camarena Villaseñor** (Mexico) said that his delegation welcomed the appointment of a new project manager for Umoja and the adjustments made to the project's governance. He also welcomed the measures proposed to control the costs of the capital master plan. It was a matter of concern that the Secretariat had provided insufficient information on the associated costs of those projects at the planning stage; in future, the Secretariat should give Member States realistic

information on the costs and long-term risks associated with such projects rather than relying on short-term decision-making by the General Assembly. Similarly, while his delegation supported the implementation of a mobility policy, details were needed on its operational mechanisms and financial implications.

29. His delegation noted the efforts made to improve the budgetary process, and achieve greater transparency and predictability. It looked forward with particular interest to proposals for keeping recosting within reasonable limits.

30. The funding arrangements for special political missions required urgent attention. During the previous decade, the cost of such missions had increased by 1,200 per cent. The mechanisms for providing such missions with human and financial resources were insufficiently responsive, distorted the regular budget cycle and undermined efforts to find efficiencies and promote transparency and accountability. Special political missions, most of which stemmed from decisions of the Security Council, were closely related to peacekeeping missions; it was unacceptable that the regular budget should fund activities related to peace and security, which were primarily the responsibility of the Council's five permanent members.

31. ICSC should maintain its technical and independent nature and ensure working conditions that would attract capable professionals, with due consideration for the budgetary austerity demanded by Member States. The Secretariat, for its part, should make realistic budget proposals consistent with the principles of transparency, austerity and efficiency, while Member States should bear in mind the common good as they scrutinized those proposals.

32. **Mr. Apakan** (Turkey) said that the Committee should continue to seek to improve its working methods without losing sight of the principles of inclusiveness, transparency, equality, openness and consensus-based decision-making. Further improvement was needed in the timely issuance of documents.

33. The ongoing impact of the economic crisis made it increasingly important that scarce resources be used effectively and efficiently. The timely implementation of enterprise resource planning, accounting and human resources reforms should be a priority; his delegation supported all modernization efforts aimed at achieving a more integrated, efficient and transparent working environment with greater accountability.

34. Special attention should be paid to budgeting for development activities in order to seek balance among the three pillars of the United Nations: development, peace and security, and human rights. Given the different budget cycle for special political missions and the growing share of resources that such missions took up, adjustments to existing budgeting procedures might be necessary.

35. All Member States should meet their financial obligations to the Organization in full, on time and without conditions. Capacity to pay should be the main factor in establishing the scale of assessments. Turkey's assessment would likely double owing to its economic growth. While prepared to assume a larger share of the burden, his country believed that a comprehensive review of the current scale methodology was necessary; transitional measures should be considered for States facing large scale-to-scale increases in their contributions.

36. As a universal organization, the United Nations should strive for the greatest possible geographical diversity in recruitment, procurement and investment. The system of desirable ranges should be made more effective, while outreach should be stepped up to make procurement more geographically diverse and cost-effective. The investment decisions of the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund should be more transparent and the Fund's assets should be diversified among developing, emerging and developed countries.

37. **Mr. Cumberbatch** (Cuba) said that his delegation was concerned at the Secretariat's expanded use of briefings for the provision of information to the Committee. While informational activities were welcome, they should complement, not substitute for, formal meetings of the Committee, so as to ensure that the information provided by the Secretariat was recorded in a transparent manner.

38. He shared the concerns expressed by others with respect to the financing and support mechanisms for special political missions. According to the proposed programme of work, the Committee would take up most of the relevant reports only three days before the end of the main part of the session. It would be better if the reports could be introduced sooner in order to allow sufficient time for their consideration.

39. Lastly, his delegation was concerned that the Secretariat appeared to interpret paragraph 27 of General Assembly resolution 66/246, on the subject of

recosting, in a manner that was not consistent with the Assembly's intent.

40. **The Chair** said that he took it that the Committee approved the proposed tentative and provisional programme of work on the understanding that the Bureau would take into account the views expressed and make the necessary adjustments.

41. *It was so decided.*

42. **The Chair** suggested that a deadline of 12 October should be set for the submission of candidacies for appointments to fill vacancies in subsidiary organs and other appointments and that the elections should be held on 2 November. He took it that the Committee had no objection to the suggestion.

43. *It was so decided.*

The meeting rose at 11.25 a.m.